

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4366
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE
CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2158

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
AGS: PINT, BG
SUBJ: ELECTION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT OF ZIA'S ADDRESS TO NATION

REF: DACCA 2151

1. CONFIRMED BY THE HEADLINES IN THIS MORNING'S
(APRIL 23) PRESS, THE HIGHLIGHT OF ZIA'S ADDRESS TO
THE NATION WAS HIS THREE STAGE REFERENCE TO THE PEOPLE
THROUGH VOTING. ZIA SAID (1) A NATIONAL REFERENDUM BASED
ON UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE WOULD BE HELD ON MAY 30
TO APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE HIM
AND HIS POLICIES, (2) THE LOCAL ELECTION SCHEDULE WOULD
CONTINUE WITH LOWEST LEVEL ELECTIONS IN THE URBAN AREAS
IN AUGUST AND DISTRICT BOARD ELECTIONS IN DECEMBER,
AND (3) NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN
DECEMBER, 1978. (WE ARE REPORTING AND COMMENTING ON
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN SEPTTEL.)
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2. ZIA REVIEWED THE PROGRESS THE COUNTRY HAD MADE UNDER
MILITARY RULE SINCE NOVEMBER, 1975, AND RESTATED
POLICIES WHICH HE PLANNED TO PURSUE IN THE FUTURE TO
CONTINUE TO BUILD NATIONAL UNITY, TO EXPAND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER. NONE
OF THESE POLICY GOALS DIFFERED FROM THOSE HE HAS PUT

FORWARD IN THE PAST AND WILL BE WELCOMED (AS WERE SIMILAR STATEMENTS IN THE PAST). ZIA ALSO REITERATED THE MILITARY'S COMMITMENT TO "DEMOCRACY", ALSO A WELCOME STATEMENT.

3. ZIA'S TIME SEQUENCE FOR ELECTIONS HAS ONE CLEAR ADVANTAGE IN THAT IT DOES SET A FRAME FOR POPULAR PARTICIPATION AT INCREASINGLY HIGHER LEVELS. BUT THE ULTIMATE STEP, THE NATIONAL ELECTION (PRESUMABLY FOR SOME SORT OF PARLIAMENTARY BODY) IS TWENTY MONTHS AWAY. THIS IS A LONG TIME TO KEEP THE HIGHLY POLITICIZED BNAGLADEHSIS ON A SHORT POLITICAL LEASH. WE WOULD THUS EXPECT A MIXED REACTION TO THIS ASPECT OF HIS PROGRAM. POLITICIANS AND OTHERS WHO BELIEVE IN REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT WILL, IN MANY CASES, WISH FOR AN EARLIER RETURN TO A PARLIAMENTARY FORM. IT WILL TAKE CAREFUL MANAGEMENT BY ZIA AND HIS ASSOCIATES TO KEEP THIS FROM TURNING TO AGITATIONAL METHODS FOR AN EARLIER VOTE.

4. ZIA COULD EXPOSE HIMSELF MUCH EARLIER TO A QUESTION OF CONFIDENCE IN HIS ADMINISTRATION. THE POLL ON MAY 30 IS DESCRIBED AS A "VOTE OF CONFIDENCE", WHICH WE TAKE TO MEAN A VOTE BOTH ON THE MAN AND ON HIS POLICIES. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT HE MUST WIN BIG AND MUST DO SO IN SUCH A WAY THAT THERE ARE NO CHARGES OF RIGGING TO OBTAIN A SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY; THE EXAMPLE OF A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY IS ILLUSTRATIVE HERE. BUT A SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY IN THIS CASE WILL HAVE TO BE VERY HIGH, IN THE NINETIES, FOR EVEN A TEN
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PERCENT REJECTION OR ABSTENTION COULD BE INTERPRETED BY HIS OPPONENTS AS WEAKNESS. AT THE SAME TIME, ZIA HAS REMOVED ANY COVER BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE ELECTORATE BY THE DEPARTURE OF SAYEM. HE STANDS ALONE AS THE POSSESSOR OF POWER AND HE WILL BE JUDGED ALONE. THE PERIOD BETWEEN NOW AND MAY 30 WILL BE A PERIOD OF MAXIMUM EXPOSURE FOR HIM AND THE TEST WILL BE ONE WHICH HE MUST PASS WITH EXEMPLARY MARKS.

5. WE HAD UNDERSTOOD THAT URBAN POLLS WOULD TAKE PLACE IN MAY OR JUNE, ALTHOUGH THIS HAD NEVER BEEN FORMALLY ANNOUNCED. THERE IS NO INDICATION WHY THESE HAVE BEEN DELAYED UNTIL AUGUST. WEATHER IS NOT A FACTOR AS THE URBAN AREAS ARE EVEN MORE AWASH IN AUGUST THAN IN JUNE. AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE URBAN ELECTIONS IS THAT THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO SHOW DIRECT INVOLVEMENT BY POLITICAL PARTIES THAN ARE THOSE IN THE RURAL AREAS WHERE SOCIAL GROUP CONNECTIONS DOMINATE. WHETHER PARTY ACTIVITY IS PERMITTED OFFICIALLY OR NOT, IT

WILL BE PRESENT AND WILL BE WATCHED CAREFULLY BY THE
MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION AS AN INDICATOR OF
POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE KEY AND SENSITIVE URBAN AREAS.

6. IN SUM, WE EXPECT SOME DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE
SLOWNESS OF THE TIMETABLE FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS,
POSSIBLE HIGH EXPOSURE IN THE REFERENDUM AND HIGHER
POLITICIZATION (COMPARED TO THE UNION PARISHAD
POLLS) IN THE URBAN BODY ELECTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME,
ZIA NOW HAS THE CAPABILITY OF MOVING DIRECTLY TOWARD THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS PROGRAMS AND INSPIRING
GREATER EFFORT IN THE CIVIL SERVICE.
MASTERS

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